

Dear Mr. Skerrett:

Thank you for your comments during the public meeting of the Mississippi River Commission held in New Orleans, Louisiana, on April 11, 2003. In your presentation you highlighted the need to initiate construction of the Buffalo Cove Water Management Unit and requested review of the navigability of the American Pass Weir.

To date, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has significantly advanced a plan that consists of constructing 10 elements within the Buffalo Cove Water Management Unit area. These elements are designed to introduce fresh water into the Buffalo Cove area, while reducing sediment deposition. The goal is to enhance the fish and wildlife resources of the area. Ecosystem response will be monitored. Element modification or improvements will be made to maximize environmental benefits. The New Orleans District has recently submitted a draft decision document and position paper to the Mississippi Valley Division and Headquarters, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers proposing methods to advance and expedite the project process. Construction of Phase I is scheduled for late fall 2003 contingent upon execution of the Project Cooperation Agreement.

The American Pass Weir is part of the Channel Training Works for the Atchafalaya River Main Channel. Channel training works were constructed to the height of the average annual high water to confine the flow. By confining the flow to the main channel, the channel works decrease the sediment deposition in the over-bank area and accelerate development of the main channel. Several channels were left open, or structures were

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constructed at the channel entrance to provide public access or allow freshwater into the over bank and interior areas. The American Pass Weir was designed to return flows to the Atchafalaya Basin Main Channel and provide navigation access across the channel training works for small watercraft and barges. There was no other channel work associated with the weir. The navigation features of the weir consist of a sill at -8.5 feet NGVD (approximately -7.72 feet Mean Low Gulf), a 25-foot width, and a 250-foot length.

We are aware that at certain times this site is difficult to navigate. In 1989 when the structure was constructed, boaters that were unfamiliar with the structure reported groundings at the weir. In response to these navigation problems, the New Orleans District installed prominent signs warning of submerged hazards. At that time, the Coast Guard also installed navigation aids at the weir.

Recently, we obtained hydraulic survey data and navigation aid locations. This information was forwarded to the Morgan City Coast Guard Aids to Navigation Unit and they determined that the navigation aids are adequate. The survey data indicated that on April 1, 2003, water depth over the marked channel just north of the weir varied from 5.9 to 15.9 feet, and across the sill of the weir the water depth exceeded 10 feet.

The New Orleans District is currently reviewing the project authorization to determine if operation and maintenance authority extends beyond the described limits of the weir, and they will advise you of the findings.

The Commission appreciates receiving your comments and looks forward to hearing from you at our future public meetings.

Sincerely,

Don T. Riley  
Brigadier General, U.S. Army  
President Designee, Mississippi  
River Commission